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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON CAFTA, DECEMBER 22, 2004

1. Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based liberal daily "La Tribuna" on 12/22, entitled "Let's get it over with." "As we said before, El Salvador has already fulfilled their duty by ratifying CAFTA. In Honduras, the pressure has increased to follow that example, while the Congress has said that once it is back from the Christmas celebrations and before the end of the year, the treaty will be discussed and approved."

"President Maduro has also joined the lobbying parade to request prompt ratification, and along with some business groups, he has warned about the negative consequences of non-ratification, such as the closing of the border with El Salvador and the eventual departure of the maquila industry once the benefits of CBI end."

"As can be seen, the reasons given for approving CAFTA aren't related to how we'll benefit from it, but to how badly we'll do if we're left out, which has proven to be a convincing argument."

"After the ratification of CAFTA, the Central American presidents will probably go to the U.S. to convince Congress to ratify it as well. So, we need to hurry, and later we will find out how CAFTA affects us and whether it damages or benefits us. As we have said, we hope its benefits surpass the disadvantages."

2. Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Heraldo" on 12/22, titled "Ratification of CAFTA." "CAFTA is more of an opportunity than a threat, and Congress shouldn't waste any more time before beginning its discussion and approving it as soon as possible."

"The opposition to CAFTA, to FTAA, and to the whole globalization trend is based on those called globophobics, usually made up of a mixture of orthodox Marxists, conservatives, and hard-core nationalists. Obviously, these groups are so engaged in their own ideology that it prevents them from seeing the advantages of free trade, not only for producers of poor countries but also for consumers who will have access to more jobs and high-quality products at lower prices."

"The Honduran Congress should approve CAFTA before the U.S. Congress does, which will probably happen in February, not only to contribute to creating a favorable environment in Central America, but also to immediately attract the attention of international investors."

3. Editorial in San Pedro Sula-based liberal daily "La Prensa" on 12/22, entitled "CAFTA." "The ratification of CAFTA is the next controversial issue on the agenda of Congress. According to certain sources in Congress, the final text will be presented next week for discussion."

"There's no doubt that, as in any commercial negotiation, the agreement has two sides, two angles, but the right course would be to direct the analysis to a search for the benefits that will outweigh the damage that some productive sectors may suffer. The worst damage to Honduras would be to be left out of a global economy that moves freely through national borders."

"The benefits of this agreement go beyond the harm to certain sectors, and some of those are protected by the treaty. The challenge is significant. If we don't take it on, it would be as if we turned our backs on history to be left out of a global economy in detriment to the majority of Hondurans who depend on their salaries."

Palmer